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CONTENTS

<u>Psalm 23 and Luke 15: A Vision Expanded</u>*

<div align="right">Kenneth E. Bailey</div>

The text of Luke 15 has been rightly called <u>Evangelium in Evangelio</u> and its theological content seems almost inexhaustible. After thirty years of careful attention to this trilogy of stories the present writer felt confident that at least the main points were understood. Recently however, through a study of the Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic versions of Psalm 23 and Luke 15, I have come to discover a new aspect of Luke 15 which if accurately perceived is hopefully worthy of note.

In this paper I will attempt to demonstrate that Luke 15 in its content and structure is modeled after Psalm 23. To our limited knowledge the suggestion is a new one. Thus it is not our intent to review other options and debate their fine points but rather to set forth a new proposal and to allow it to stand or fall of its own accord. We will here argue that the author of Luke 15 has reflected on Ps 23 and decided to re-use the material by turning its main metaphors into stories. Some material from Ps 23 is omitted and some new material is added. I find no scientific evidence to deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the composer of the individual stories and the compiler of the trilogy that appears in the Lucan text. But this is not the focus of this study. Rather we will argue that whatever its authorship Luke 15 is the twenty-third psalm rewritten. How then can such a case be made?

Eight points of comparison between the two texts are observable. We will discuss them briefly in the dramatic order of the parable itself.

In the first place each text opens with the story of a shepherd. Psalm 23 is the famous "Good Shepherd Psalm" and Luke 15 obviously opens with the story of a shepherd and a lost sheep. The similarity between the two is unmistakable. At the same time, if the comparison is <u>intentional</u> then Luke 15 affirms a very high Christology. In Psalm 23 the Psalmist tells the reader, "<u>Yahweh</u> is my shepherd." If Jesus is the good shepherd in Luke 15:3-7

and the two texts are parallel then an extremely significant Christological affirmation is being made.

The question of the presence of Christology in Luke 15 is unavoidable. In verse 2 the Pharisees complain, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Jesus does not try to defend himself by denying table fellowship with outcasts or by claiming that the sinners must first repent, or by insisting that he only rarely indulged in such a practice. Rather he replies <u>by telling a story about a man who receives a sinner and eats with him</u>. The story of the prodigal son ends with the account of a man (the father) who receives a sinner (the prodigal) and eats with him. Thus the text of Luke obliges the reader to ask the Christological question. Keeping in mind the Pharisaic complaint recorded in Luke 15:2, we are surely obliged <u>in some sense</u> to see the figure of the father in the third story as a symbol of Jesus.

A full answer to the above query hangs on two questions. These are:
1.   Can it be substantiated that Ps 23 and Luke 15 are indeed parallel?
2.   Does the shepherd of Luke 15:3-7 symbolize Jesus?

The answer to the first question is related to the entire argument of this study and the reader will hopefully withhold judgment until the full case has been presented.

In regard to the second, we can note that the popular mind has always seen Jesus the Good Shepherd in Luke 15:3-7. This common perception has no doubt been reinforced for centuries through an unconscious fusion of Luke 15 and John 10. But a close scrutiny of the text of Luke 15 does not allow any such unqualified identification. Luke 15:4 reads, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if <u>he has lost one of them</u> ..." This is not a <u>good</u> shepherd, but rather a <u>careless</u> shepherd. Like Bo Peep <u>he</u> has lost his sheep. <u>He</u> is responsible. Matthew has the same parable, but does not blame the shepherd. He records, "If one of them has gone astray" (Matt 18:12), placing the

blame clearly on the sheep. In Luke 15:4, as noted, the shepherd is blamed. But that same shepherd then pays the price to restore the sheep by going after it until he finds it. How is this bad shepherd/good shepherd to be understood?

In the Middle East, serious minded people communicate with one another magnificently through the use of skilfully crafted parables. This is especially noticeable in situations of conflict. So here in Luke 15, the Pharisees, as we have noted, come with a complaint. If we translate the tensions of the opening thrust of the parable into Western conceptual language, Jesus is answering,

> Listen you shepherd's of Israel, you have lost your sheep. I am taking the trouble to go after them and you now come complaining about my efforts. I can't believe it! I am making up for your mistakes. Your criticism is outrageous!"

So in fact the carefully crafted story in Luke 15 starts with a careless shepherd who loses his sheep and ends with a very good shepherd who goes after it and pays the price to carry it back to the village. Thus our traditional interpretation although˙ imprecise is not mistaken. The story does have a good shepherd in it and Jesus is certainly talking about himself. As indicated, the larger Christological question can only be answered in the light of the entire paper and will be deferred to the end of the discussion. In passing, however, we note that a single figure in the parable symbolizes both the Pharisees and Jesus. This remarkable phenomenon of the double use of a single symbol reoccurs in the third story.

Having noted the shepherd, we must also observe the woman and her coin. Here we observe the major thematic expansion of the Psalm. The OT generally reflects a high standard of equality between men and women. But in the inter-testament period this position was eroded. A very low point is reached in Ecclesiasticus. Male chauvinist

Ben Sira records one of the harshest "put downs" on women in religious literature. He writes,

> Moth comes out of clothes
>   and a woman's spite out of woman.
> A man's spite is preferable to a woman's kindness.
>   Women give rise to shame and reproach.
> (42:12-14)

There are lights as well as shadows in Ben Sira's views on women and the lights should not be denied (1). In this connection the stories of Esther and Judith must not be forgotten. But with Ben Sira the shadows seem to dominate. The same can be said of Rabbinic literature in general. The Midrash Rabbah on Genesis (a fourth century rabbinic commentary) reads "Women are said to possess four traits: they are greedy, eavesdroppers, slothful and envious." (2) The same volume also reads,

> Why does a man go out bareheaded while a woman goes out with her head covered? She is like one who has done wrong and is ashamed of people; therefore she goes out with her head covered.
> Why do (the women) walk in front of the corpse (at a funeral)? Because they brought death into the world...
> Why was the precept of the Sabbath lights given to her? Because she extinguished the soul of Adam. (3)

Tractate Sotah of the Jerusalem Talmud reads, "Let the teachings of the Torah be burned, but let them not be handed over to women."(4)

In the Middle East such views are not limited to rabbinic sources. Early Church fathers can also be faulted as can Islam. Taken together it is fair to say that negative attitudes toward women were common in the world within which Jesus was raised. His new vision of the worth of women is amazing in the light of this Middle Eastern background. Among many other acts, Jesus dared to have

women among his band of travelling disciples (Luke 8:1-3) and he crafted a significant number of his parables into doublets with one story from the world of men and the other from the world of women. He is the only rabbinic teacher to have done so. So here, the same theme is dealt with twice in roughly the same manner. The hero of the first story is a man (the shepherd) and in the second story a woman becomes a model of responsibility and diligence. If there is Christology in the first parable then Christology is inevitably also present in the second. Any reflection on Jesus the good shepherd must also consider the topic of Jesus the good woman. The fact that the church has not historically chosen to engage in such reflection is surely the church's loss.

So the story of the woman and her coin is a significant addition to the inherited structure of the Psalm. Psalm 23 has two sections. It opens with a shepherd and closes with an account of a generous host at a banquet. Luke 15 likewise opens with a shepherd and ends with a generous host at a banquet. But Jesus's rewrite is composed of three elements, not two. In the middle of Luke 15 appears the above noted new element – the woman.

At the same time, Jesus's dramatic addition is not a root out of a dry ground. Ps 23 has overtones of female activity. In v. 5 the psalmist writes, "Thou preparest a table before me ..." In the East (as in most of the West) women prepare banquets – not men. Abraham meets his disguised heavenly guests, presses his hospitality on them and then (naturally) calls on Sara to prepare some food (Gen 18:6). The personified wisdom of the book of Proverbs mixes her wine and sets her table and calls to the simple, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed" (Prov 9:2-5). But in Psalm 23 God does the work of a woman – he prepares a table before the psalmist. Furthermore the Hebrew verb 'araka (to prepare) is used for both Moses and Aaron who are each instructed to "prepare a table" for the Lord (Ex 40:4; Lev 24:8). Thus Ps 23:5 may also reflect a reversal of roles. What ordinarily the worshipper does for God, suddenly God is doing for the psalmist.

Consistently in the OT cultic activities were carried out by men and the preparations of a table for God in the tabernacle are fairly simple. Granted, the full preparations for worship recorded in Ex 40 are elaborate, but the preparation of the table appear to be a minor affair. Aaron is instructed to place cakes and incense on it but not more. By contrast a full social occasion is briefly pictured in Ps 23. The range of images all speak of a great banquet. The table is spread, the cup is filled to over flowing, and the head is anointed with oil. All of these traditional acts took place at banquets, and naturally the food and drink were prepared by women. Thus the text indirectly calls attention to an activity of women which is here carried out by the host. We can thus suggest that Jesus overhears this startling double reversal of roles and expands each of them. The muted female theme is expanded and becomes the second parable. The theme of the master who spreads a banquet for them rather than they preparing one for him is also expanded and appears at the close of the third parable.

Our second point of comparison between the two texts has to do with the good shepherd, his sheep and the theme of repentance. It is obvious that Luke 15 discusses repentance in a story about a good shepherd and his sheep. Is there a precedent for this? There is. It is in Ps 23. Our traditional translations, however, of Ps 23:3a have for centuries given us some form of "he restores my soul." This generally means – when I become discouraged the Lord renews me. He "restores my soul." But the Hebrew text reads, "nafshi jashubib" which literally translates, "He causes me to repent." The great Hebrew word shub (repentance) appears at the heart of the phrase. The Peshitta Syriac version catches this with nefshi afni, again, "He causes me to repent." Thus Ps 23 clearly uses the picture of a good shepherd and his sheep as a setting for the topic of repentance. As noted, so does Jesus.

Themes three and four form a single theological coin and can be dealt with together. These are (ç3) each account tells a story of a lost sheep. In each (ç4) the lost sheep is restored by the shepherd. In the past I have

argued elsewhere that the speech of the prodigal in the far country does not mean that he repented.(5) In the parable of the lost sheep repentance is redefined. The lost sheep does nothing but get lost and yet becomes a symbol of repentance. For Jesus repentance is not a work which the believer does, but is rather acceptance of being found.(6) In the far country the prodigal does not accept to be found. The parable tells of a young man who asks for his inheritance, gets it, sells it and travels into a far country. He then wastes his money and descends to feeding pigs. The story then records, "But when he came to himself he said...." In popular Western idiom we speak of a young people "finding themselves" or of someone who is directionless and say of him "he has not yet found himself." I am convinced that the story of the prodigal son is the source of this language. Sometime in the distant past the parable gave birth in English to these idioms. Thus the phrase "he came to himself" gradually became a convenient way of saying, "He finally accepted responsibility for himself," or "He finally sorted out his priorities and his values and integrated his own person." Indeed, in the parable the prodigal offers a repentant speech. Thus interpreters for centuries have seen him as repenting in the far country. However, the language used in Greek (eis heauton de elthon) never means repentance in any other text. The Hebrew word shûb (return) and the Greek metanoeo (he changed his mind) are never the equivalents of the peculiar phrase "He came to himself." (7)

Granted, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, writing at the end of the first century, uses nearly the same phrase. An elaborately dressed young man presents himself to the slave philosopher who tells the young man that authentic beauty is to "follow the best nature of man" and is not to be found in flashy clothes and fancy hair styling. Epictetus then tells him "when you come to yourself" you will realize this.(8)

However stoic Greek phraseology is hardly an appropriate key for this particular linguistic lock. The story of the prodigal is too Jewish and too Middle Eastern

in its cultural fabric. Rather, the answer to this puzzle is available in Ps 23:3a. As observed, the Hebrew text can mean "He causes me to repent." It can also be translated, "he brings me back". The Syriac Peshitta chose the first (as observed) and the long history of Arabic translations of the Psalms have consistently opted for the second. But what is it that he brings back?

There are no "souls" in the OT. The disembodied soul is a Greek invention. The OT person is a <u>nefesh</u> which is a whole person composed of body and spirit. So in Psalm 23 God brings my <u>nefesh</u> back. Back from what? Obviously the psalmist considers himself lost. He continues, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness." What kind of paths was he wandering in previously? Obviously paths of unrighteousness. In short, the psalmist reports that he was lost and Yahweh the good shepherd brought him back, caused him to repent and lead him in the right paths. <u>God</u> does the acting and the return is to <u>himself</u>. God brings the lost one back to <u>God</u>.

What then of Luke 15? At times retro-translation into a semitic language is helpful in trying to recapture the meaning of a text that originally sprang out of a semitic mind. For this exercise I have for decades turned to the long sweep of Syriac and Arabic versions of the New Testament that stretch from the second to the 20th centuries. Since the second century Middle Eastern Christians have consistently read a text that has told them of the prodigal's return to his own <u>nefesh</u>. That is, Luke 15:17 in Syriac and Arabic has always had the word <u>nefesh</u> in the translation. Thus in Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic the two texts are strikingly interlocked. But in Ps 23:3 <u>God</u> is the actor. He restores my <u>nefesh</u> (my whole person) to <u>himself</u>. While in Luke 15:17, the <u>prodigal</u> is doing the acting. It is a "do it yourself" operation. <u>He</u> is the actor and the return is to <u>himself</u>. Obviously the prodigal journeys back to his father's house, as does his brother at the end of the story. But on a deeper level he is returning to himself. This is seen clearly in the fact that his motive is in the text. The prodigal is not sorry he broke his father's heart by asking for his inheritance

when the father was still alive and thus affirming a desire
to have him dead. Nor is the prodigal even ashamed that he
lost the money. He simply wants to eat and he says so. He
states unambiguously "My father's craftsmen _misthoi_ (9)
have bread enough and to spare while I perish here with
hunger." He wants to eat. He must (he feels) find some
way to restore the lost money. Craftsmen in any society
earn high wages. He remembers that the craftsmen in his
fathers house are able to pay their bills, their taxes and
build up a bank account. They have "bread enough and to
spare." If there was still money in his pocket he would
not consider returning. The suffering he has caused others
is not considered. He thinks only of himself. Granted he
will need to make a confession – there is no hope to eat
without it. Besides, the only alternative is to starve
among the pigs.

So the psalmist affirms that _God_ will bring him back
to _God_. The prodigal contemplates a face saving plan where
_he_ will restore himself to _himself_. He will come back to
himself and will yet pull himself up by his own boot
straps. He will go home and pay his way by working as a
craftsmen.

With this mentality the son starts back, steeling his
nerves for a humiliating entrance into the home village.
The Amish of Western Pennsylvania in America control the
social behaviour of their community through the threat of
what is called a "shun." Any Amish person who is shunned
is ostracised totally by the community. In like manner,
first century Palestinian Judaism formally rejected any
member of the community who lost the family's wealth to
the gentiles. Only gentiles kept pigs. The prodigal in
the far country has indeed lost a significant portion of
the family's wealth to the gentiles. After losing his
money, if he dares return to his home village a special
ceremony will be enacted. The ceremony (entitled the
kezazah ceremony) called for the community to assemble and
break a great earthenware pot in front of the wayward
person symbolizing an irreconcilable separation from the
society (10).

With intense anxiety the young man approaches the village. Suddenly he is overwhelmed by the indescribable scene of his father running towards him through the crowded village street. Gentlemen in the East, wearing long robes, do not run anywhere. The Father deliberately reaches the boy before the boy reaches the village and in this manner the father protects the prodigal from the hostility of the town. On the profoundest level of their relationship the father brings him back. The father "nafsho jashubib" (he causes him to repent). In a flash the son sees what he has really done and accepts to be found and restored. In the far country, the prodigal twists the language of Ps 23:a. Then at the edge of the town the full meaning of that same language is brilliantly demonstrated by the father's costly love. The father than describes his own act by saying, "He was lost and is found." He not say, "He was lost and has come home." The father finds and restores the lost son even as the shepherd finds and restores the lost sheep and as the woman finds and restores the lost coin, indeed as Yahweh finds and restores the Psalmist. We have noted Christology in the parables of the shepherd and the woman. Is not some form of Christology inevitably demonstrated in the actions of the father?

Theme five is the appearance of the symbols of danger and death in each text. Affirmations of rescue from that danger and death also occur. These themes are obvious and no elaboration is necessary. The presence of these ideas further reinforces the parallels between the two passages. The sixth point of comparison is more closely tied to the culture of the Middle East and requires brief comment. Our theologies have traditionally emphasised that God is love and so He comes to save as an expression of that love. Yet in the OT we are presented with a two sided coin. Jeremiah and Hosea tell us that God saves because he loves. Then Ezekiel proclaims that God saves because he is Holy. The holiness of God is a theologically complex reality that exhibits a number of major aspects. Central to the concept of the holiness of God is God's honour. Honour, as a primary motivating life force, may have fallen into disrepute in Western society. Yet we still respond positively to a concern for "dignity, self-worth and

self-respect." Surviving prisoners of war and conscience from the Nazi death camps to the Gulag Archapellego and on to the prisons of Maoist China and North Viet Nam have written moving accounts of the importance of maintaining that inner sense of personal dignity and worth. Survival itself depends on it. Frankle, Solzhenitsyn, Ginsburg, Cheng and Ratushinskaya all make clear that when this is lost - everything is lost. Thus from modern theories of child psychology, to mental health concerns, to the struggles of prisoners of conscience, on all sides we hear of the need for affirming human dignity, self-worth and self respect. The Biblical authors agree. But they take the argument one step further. If these are legitimate concerns for the personhood of people, are they not even greater legitimate concerns for the personhood of God? The prophets think that they are.

So in the Book of Ezekiel God declares,

> "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel,
> that I am about to act, but for the sake of my
> holy name, which you have profaned among the
> nations to which you came. I will vindicate
> the holiness of my great name, which has been
> profaned among the nations, and which you have
> profaned among them; and the nations will know
> that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when
> through you I indicate my holiness before their
> eyes.
>
> For I will take you from the nations ...,
> and bring you into your own land.
> I will sprinkle clean water upon you;
> I will give you a new heart and a new spirit.
> And I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone
> and give you a heart of flesh." (Ez 26:22-26)

God does not act to save because he is love but because he is holy. He does not save for their sake. He saves for his sake.

Thus Jeremiah and Hosea tell of a God who saves for their sake out of his love. Ezekiel tells of how God saves for his sake out of his Holiness. Deutero-Isaiah brings the two emphases together in numerous marvellously structured passages. One of them is Is 43:3-4 which states the following:

> For I am the Lord your God,
>> GOD IS HOLY
> The Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.
>> I give Egypt as your ransom.
>>> GOD REDEEMS
> Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
> Because you are precious in my eyes,
> GOD LOVES YOU
> and honoured, and I love you,
>> I give men in return for you,
>>> GOD REDEEMS
>>> peoples in exchange for your life.

So what of the 23rd Psalm? The text is clear. God the shepherd "brings me back. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The Psalmist's meaning is made brilliantly clear when we turn to Luke 15.

Why does the shepherd in Luke 15 go after the lost sheep? We have in the West generally assumed that he did so because he loved the sheep. This is no doubt a part of the assumption of the text. But is that really the shepherd's primary motivation? After all he has 99 others. Tomorrow he will shear, and may sell or butcher and eat the sheep. After all he keeps them for his sake not for their sake. So what is the larger part of his motivation?

The shepherd lives in a community. He says to himself,

> "My grandfather never lost a sheep! My father never lost a sheep! Let it not be said in this town that I have lost a sheep! Let not the neighbours wonder if I am brave, strong and trustworthy! I will find my sheep."

The woman is faced with the same problem. True, the coin may be a part of her dowry, and thus this particular coin may have sentimental value for her – she may "love it." But is there not another motive? What about her self worth as she admits the loss of one of her precious coins to her husband? What is it that really drives her to search diligently down in the cracks of the uneven floor of her home to find her coin? And what is it that is really restored when she finds it? Does she not restore the dignity and self worth of her own person? Is not this the reason for joy at her party?

Finally, what of the father and the prodigal? Again, we have always looked at the love of the father. This is certainly a clear and powerful motive in the story. The father's compassion is mentioned in the text. But in the West we have a constant tendency to individualize the characters in the parables of Jesus. Thus we imagine this story to be a parable involving only three people. Rather many other people make up the full cast. The older brother mentions a circle of friends. The servants of the house are told to dress the boy. The older son returning from the field meets a <u>paidon</u> who is most likely a young boy and is one of many young boys milling around in the courtyard of the house. The fatted calf must be eaten that night which means at least 200 guests. There are hired entertainers who perform with music and dancing. This is indeed a story of a family in a community. So, all of us have known of families with a wayward son. Our own experience brings into focus something of the shame that such a son brings to the family in the eyes of the community. In the highly structured family relationships of the Middle East such shame is almost undescribable. That is, when the younger son wants his father to die and tells him so and then takes his inheritance and disappears with the father still in good health the family is deeply shamed beyond any description.

So why then does the father run down the road to welcome him? Indeed, he does so because he loves him. It <u>is</u> for the sake of the prodigal. But the father also acts

for his own sake. His own dignity and honour are recovered when his son is restored to the family fold. God saves for <u>our sake</u> because he is <u>love</u>. God saves for <u>his sake</u> because he is <u>holy</u>. The shepherd searches and finds because he loves and because he cares for his own dignity and worth. The woman does the same. Again Luke 15 is linked to Ps 23 and the parable brilliantly clarifies and expands the psalm.

Our seventh point of comparison has to do with the spreading of a banquet. The Psalm tells of a banquet. But it is not an ordinary banquet. This banquet is spread in the <u>presence</u> of the <u>guest's enemies</u>. The Psalm reads

> Thou preparest a table before me
>   in the presence of my enemies;
> thou anointest my head with oil,
>   my cup overflows.

This is a formal lavish banquet – but what is the significance of the reference to the <u>enemies</u>? Simply stated this means that anyone in trouble with the top executive officers in a modern Western company suddenly finds himself a leper in company circles. Few people stop by his desk for a chat and when he walks into the coffee room suddenly the room empties. The psalmist himself describes this very phenomenon in Ps. 31 where he writes,

> In Thee, O Lord, do I seek refuge;...
> deliver me from the hand of my enemies and
> persecutors...
> I am the scorn of all my <u>adversaries</u>
> a horror to my <u>neighbours</u>,
> an object of dread to my <u>acquaintances</u>;
> those who <u>see</u> me in the <u>street</u> flee from me.

So Psalm 23:5 reads, "Thou preparest a table before me in the <u>presence of my enemies</u>." I have enemies. Anyone who stands with me will pay a price to do so. The Psalmist is aware that God is willing not only to stand with him but to honour him by spreading a banquet for him. The banquet

is not in secret, but is spread openly in the presence of the psalmist's enemies.

The winter of 1964-65 as a family we were living in Assiut, Egypt. President Nasser was at the height of his power and popularity and his anti-Americanism was at its most intense pitch. That winter four German students stopped at our front gate and asked if they could pitch a tent in our garden for the night. I granted permission but explained that I had to register them with the local police in order to comply with regulations. I filled out the required forms, sent them to the police and the students left the next morning. Then, four months later I suddenly found myself summoned to the court in Luxor (three hours away by train) to face felony charges. The charges were that I had not registered the four Germans properly. The penalty if found guilty ranged from a stiff fine to eight years in prison. It was four months before the case was heard. In the mean time I experienced the psalmist's plight. I became a "horror to my neighbours, an object of dread to my acquaintances." Literally those who saw me in the street avoided me. Invitations to preach were cancelled. Committees of which I was a member did not meet. No one wanted to have their car seen parked in front of my house. The trial was set for a Monday. As I prepared to travel I was surprised by joy when an elder in the Egyptian Presbyterian Church in Assiut bravely chose to go with me to Luxor. We took the train on Saturday. On arrival the pastor of the Egyptian Presbyterian Church in Luxor invited me to preach on that Sunday morning. After the service those two men flanked me and with arms locked with mine marched me down the canter of the main street of Luxor, sat me down in a sidewalk cafe in full view of the town and fed me a meal. They "prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies." They metaphorically anointed my head with oil and literally filled my cup to overflowing. The next day, anxious to protect them I plead with them to let me go alone to the court. They answered, "You are our Christian Brother and we must go with you!" Later that morning justice was done. I was declared innocent and left the court a free man. In the process I discovered something of the meaning of the banquet spread

at great cost referred to in Ps 23. Jesus understood more. In his parable the father orders a banquet to celebrate the restoration of the prodigal. But all are not pleased. The older brother and his circle of friends are angry at the banquet. The older son decides to humiliate the father publicly in the presence of his guests by staging a public drama of rejection in the courtyard of the ancestral home. Indeed the prodigal can well say to his father,

> Father you have prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies. My brother and his friends are outside. They are angry. They will find a way to hurt you as deeply as they can."

Again a brief picture in Psalm 23 is expanded into an extended story in Luke 15.

Finally there remains the Christological question. As noted above, the Pharisees in v. 3 complain, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So Jesus then tells a story about a father who receives a sinner and eats with him. Who then is the father? Traditional interpretation is not in error. Early in the story this central figure is clearly a symbol for God the Father. But when the father twice in the same day leaves his home and offers costly love to his wayward sons, and when he prepares a banquet for the prodigal he becomes a symbol of the God who comes in the form of a suffering servant in order to redeem. The good shepherd, the good woman and the good father – each pays a price to redeem. Each saves through costly love and each restores his/her own self respect. Each celebrates a costly finding with a party.

If my thesis is correct, that is, if these two texts are interrelated in the manner we have suggested, and if metaphorical theology can be seen as a serious form of theology, indeed the primary form of theology in Biblical literature, then the source of the highest level of Christology in the New Testament can be traced historically to this Jewish Palestinian parable and not simply attributed to the creative energies of a second generation of Greek christians in the early church.

Thus, it is surely possible for a Christian to affirm in the new covenant,

> The Lord is my shepherd. He is with me in the dark valley of the far country. He brings me back. He restores me for my sake and for his name's sake. He spreads before me a costly banquet and my cup overflows.

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(Tantur),
Jerusalem.

*   This lecture was delivered as part of the Richard Smyth Lectures in Union Theological College, Belfast in January 1990.

Notes

1. Kenneth E. Bailey, "Women in Ben Sirach And in The New Testament." For Me To Live (Essays in Honer of James Leon Kelso) Ed. by R. A. Coughenour, (Cleveland: Dillon/Leiderbach Books, 1972) p. 56-73.

2. Midrash Rabbah, Genesis. XLV, 5. Tr. by H. Freedman, (London: Soncino, 1983) p. 383.

3. Ibid., p. 139.

4. The Talmud of the Land of Israel, Vol. 27, Sotah. Tr. by Jacob Neusner, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) p. 95.

5. Kenneth E. Bailey, Poet and Peasant, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) p. 173f.

6. Ibid., 155.

7. Ibid., 173f.

8.   <u>Epictetus   Disc</u>. 3.1,15.   cf. <u>Epictetus</u>, Vol II,
      Loebs Classical Library, Tr. W. A. Olfather,
      (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1966) p. 10.

9.   K. E. Bailey, <u>Poet and Peasant</u>, 176f.

10.   Ibid., 167.

Yahweh and Mal'ak in the Early Traditions of Israel: A Study of the Underlying Traditions of Yahweh/Angel Theophany in Exodus 3.

J.O. Akao

INTRODUCTION

The Biblical narrative which reports the Mosaic/Divine encounter at the Burning Bush in Exodus chapter 3 has over the years posed problems for Old Testament scholars.[1] On the literary plane, it has been very difficult disentangling the various hypothetical documentary strands that make up the story,[2] while as a narrative it has been treated under various headings like: Cultic Aetiology, Myth, Fairy Tale or a Bush Burning but not Consumed, Knowing the Name of God Motif or the Possession of Miraculous Powers as the Mark of a Special Relationship with the Deity. From the philosophical point of view, because of the linguistic problems shrouding the verb form of the Tetragrammaton, the question has often been put whether there was a disclosure of a Name at all at the Burning Bush.

To compound the problem, the present state of the Corpus makes it difficult to say precisely who appeared to Moses, Yahweh or Angel (His Mal'ak), in Exodus 3:2,4. The quest for a solution to this last problem constitutes the thrust of this investigation which aims at unravelling the underlying Traditions behind the confusing involvement of Yahweh and Mal'ak in the Theophany.

This enquiry has been necessitated by the fact that any conscientious reader of the Old Testament, especially the Pentateuch, cannot but be confused as to what is the relationship between Yahweh and His Angel Mal'ak and also what designation lies behind the use of the word Angel or Mal'ak Yahweh. Did the Biblical author or compiler have at the back of his mind two distinct personalities or just two Names for the same personage? In this article we shall attempt a solution to this impasse in the understanding of "the early Traditions of Israel".

YAHWEH AND Mal'ak IN THE EARLY TRADITIONS OF ISRAEL.

In the projected early Traditions of Israel,[3] the figure of the personage behind the word Angel or Mal'ak Yahweh is so elusive and perplexing that various interpretations have been advanced for its understanding. It could mean either a form of appearance of Yahweh in the nature of a double or "extended soul", or, on the other hand, a being enjoying a personal existence clearly differentiated from that of Yahweh. On some occasions, the Mal'ak could become a genuine representative of the Deity in its full capacity, playing a part comparable to that of a Divine, or one whose presence has the same impact as that of the Deity. In fact passages such as Genesis 16:7ff; 21:17ff; 22:11ff; 31:11ff; Exodus 3:2 and Judges 2:1ff which are unlike other passages containing the Mal'ak Yahweh stories show that it is an impossible task to differentiate between the Mal'ak and Yahweh Himself. This is because the one who speaks or acts, Yahweh or Mal'ak, is obviously one and the same person.[4]

But on other occasions, or even in the same passage, the Mal'ak is presented as nothing short of a human figure such as we have in Judges 13:16 and Genesis 18:8 where he could be told to eat food; or Genesis 32:25 where he wrestled like a man with Jacob and touched the hollow of his thigh; or Judges 6:21 and Numbers 22:31 where he is presented as possessing a staff or a drawn sword; or Genesis 28:12 where he requires a ladder to shuttle between earth and heaven; or Judges 6:11 where there is a long report on how he sits and discusses.

In view of this apparent ambiguity in the presentation of the Angel figure as man and at the same time as one whom men could see and then proclaim unequivocally that they have seen God, is it possible to go beyond the literary form to recover what concept the Old Testament writers had of the figure?

THE CONCEPT OF THE Mal'ak FIGURE

In discussing the concept of the Mal'ak we must first look briefly at the Name and what it connotes. The Old Testament Hebrew word used for Angel Mal'ak derives from the root L'K which has no extant occurrence in Hebrew,

while the Arabic cognate <u>l'aaka</u> means "to send with a commission".[5] As an abstract noun, it could mean sending, mission or embassy from which the concrete notion "messenger" developed only very much later. Understood in its sense of messenger, the Hebrew word <u>Mal'ak</u> could be used for those who carry messages from one person to another and it is found in this sense in connection with the kings of the Old Testament. This very word <u>Mal'ak</u> used for human figures carrying messages from one king to another is also used for the being who carries messages from God to man.

It is remarkable that nowhere in the Massoretic Text is there any indication given that these two types of messengers differ and we also do not find any traces to that effect in the Septuagint which uses the word <u>aggelos</u> indiscriminately to render <u>mal'ak</u>, (cf. Priest <u>mal'ak</u> Mal 2:7; prophet <u>mal'ak</u> Haggai 1:13; King's wrath <u>mal'ak</u> Proverbs 16:14 etc.). So for the Massoretic Text, messenger of whatever gender or status is <u>mal'ak</u>.

But with the Vulgate, there appears a special word "Angelus" to differentiate or distinguish the messenger of God from other types of messenger. This distinction between Angel and Messenger in rendering the M.T. <u>Mal'ak</u> is not only arbitrary and finds no support in the Original Text, but also reflects the later highly developed theology of Angelology. We may illustrate this with some examples.

TEXT	VULGATE	MT	LXX
1 Kings 19:7 Angel of the Lord ..	<u>Angelus</u>	<u>Mal'ak</u>	<u>aggelos</u>
2 Kings 1:2 Ahaziah sent Messengers ...	<u>Nuntio</u>	<u>Mal'ak</u>	<u>aggelos</u>
2 Kings 1:3a Angel of the Lord said to Elijah ...	<u>Angelus</u>	<u>Mal'ak</u>	<u>aggelos</u>

| 2 Kings 1:3b | Nuntiorum | Mal'akim | aggelōn |
| Go up to meet the messengers of the king .. | Regis | | |

| 2 Kings 1:5 | Nuntii | Mal'akim | hoi aggeloi |
| The messengers returned to the king ... | | | |

| 2 Kings 1:15 | A n g e l u s | Mal'ak | aggelos |
| Then the Angel of the Lord said ... | Domini | | |

| 2 Kings 19:14 | Nuntiorum | La Mal'ak | aggelōn |
| Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it ... | | | |

From this table, to which many more additions could
be made, it becomes evident that the Old Testament in its
use of Mal'ak Yahweh, at least from the linguistic point of
view, did not think of a figure or being in terms of our
own ideas about angels, inherited from the Medieval Period.
The concept or notion of Angel/Mal'ak as a Supernatural
Being or Divine Being appears strange to Old Testament
writers. It is therefore very doubtful whether the Old
Testament writers thought there were Angels the way we
think of them, ie. Heavenly Divine Beings. From the way
Mal'ak Elohim or Mal'ak Yahweh is used, the Old Testament
writers give us little or no reason to believe that they
pictured this messenger as any other than a human being.[6]
Faint traces of this concept are still found even in
passages where the Angel has been identified or equated
with Yahweh. In such passages his distinction and messenger
status is still retained. In 2 Samuel 24:16 he is distinct
from Yahweh while in Gen. 22:16 he is found speaking in
prophetic terminology and after delivering his message
says: "ne'um YHWH" - "Thus says the Lord". And also in
Genesis 16:7-14 where he acts side by side with Yahweh, his
function is distinguished from that of Yahweh: it is the
Mal'ak who speaks to Hagar and says to her, Yahweh has

heard the cries, but it is Yahweh Himself who opens her eyes or hears her prayers. From this subtle differentiation the following remark can be made: when the reference is to God in his Divine invisible capacity, the word Yahweh is used, but when Yahweh or God enters the perception of man, the Mal'ak is introduced. Thus the biblical writers want to say that Mal'ak Yahweh is the extended soul of Yahweh or his invisible executive when he intervenes in human affairs. In the early literature of the Old Testament, he personified Yahweh's assistance to Israel and only in rare cases is he found turning against them in punishment as in 2 Samuel 24:17. He is invariably presented as the Mediator of Yahweh's grace to Israel.

From this use, it seems that whenever this figure appeared, as the Biblical narratives have it, the stories originally probably referred quite naively to purely physical observable beings. It is such primitive pre-literary theophanies of Mal'ak, one would surmise, that the editors of the Pentateuch claimed for Yahweh and took the necessary steps to soften in the interests of Yahweh's strict transcendence in the light of what was later known of his mode of manifestation.

We may even note here that even in the course of harmonization of the primitive Mal'ak, an observable being's appearance, with the later Yahweh's literary theophany, care has been taken to guard against "sacrilegious" references to Yahweh in his status of Deity, which makes the editors reserve for Him in such theophanies activities which only befit the Deity. This somewhat subtle theological interpretation which is Biblically based is founded on the fact that in very many instances, the Angel is at once identified with God and differentiated from Him. In Gen. 31:13; Ex. 3:2,6 he identifies himself with Yahweh, and in Gen. 16:11; 22:12, 15 he speaks with the authority of Yahweh. But in Gen. 16:13; 48:15; Hos. 12:4,5 he is spoken of by others as Yahweh or God.

It is, however, remarkable that from the period of the Monarchy onwards, we cease to hear of this close relationship or confusing identity between Yahweh and the Mal'ak. A conceptual gulf had come to separate the one from

the other. And even in stories of the intervention of a divine emissary such as are to be found in the book of Kings, and in the post exilic writings, it is clearly a matter of a servant of Yahweh quite distinct from his master. The great prophets do not even mention him, which probably gives us room to assume that they took up the role and played the function exercised elsewhere by the <u>Mal'akim</u>. In one place we even find the title applied to one of the prophets (Hag. 1:3).

But in the post-exilic period, belief in superhuman and celestial beings called Angels was beginning to develop. This concept of Angelology which probably had its inception in the exilic period,[7] is found as an important feature in the Qumran Texts, Rabbinic Literature and the writings of the New Testament. Thus the later notion of Angel functioning as an intermediary is different from the Old Testament notion of <u>Mal'ak</u> who is both one with Yahweh and also distinct from him as his messenger. Thus in the Old Testament context between the apparent haphazard alternation of the two figures, Yahweh and <u>Mal'ak</u>, we think there seems to be a theological concern which is to designate the visible figure in the pre-literary theophany as messenger and going behind him to posit a transcendent literary figure, Yahweh, whom he represents with both of them functioning at one and the same time.

This speculative reshaping of older Traditions which is very common and striking in the Old Testament is an important literary theologisation. It enabled the Old Testament writers to build bridges connecting later Yahweh religion with the religion of the Fathers and also made it possible to speak of the presence of Yahweh in many places without calling in question his unity as well as his intervention amongst men without challenging his transcendence.

In all this, one point is clear: in spite of the efforts made to show that Yahweh is one with his <u>Mal'ak</u>, we do not hear of a single instance when Yahweh and another being legitimately lay claim to the worship of Israel. It was Yahweh and Yahweh alone! Thus where <u>Mal'ak</u> is identified with him, it is a subtle effort to raise to a

higher level an originally primitive or stark anthropomorphic theophany.

So our ultimate explanation of the ambiguity is no doubt to be sought in the advance of religious thought to a more theological apprehension of the Divine nature. Thus in all certainty the oldest conception of the theophany was a visible personal appearance of the Deity which later theologians, conscious of the danger posed by this bold anthropomorphism, took steps to reconcile with the belief in the invisibility of God who acts amongst men through the agency of the "Word" as in the Prophets, or through the Mal'ak as we have in the projected early Traditions.[8]

This theological tendency of interpreting the primitive and bold anthropomorphic theophanies in the light of later Yahweh faith in the context of his spiritual transcendence can be seen in a comparison of the two basic forms of the Pentateuchal theophanies — by Yahweh and by an intermediary the Mal'ak. We would wish to maintain that it is elements from these two forms of theophanies that the writer of the "Divine Encounter" story of Exodus chapter 3 has welded together to constitute the content of the call of Moses.

THE TWO UNDERLYING TRADITIONS OF THE THEOPHANY IN EXODUS 3.

YAHWEH THEOPHANY	MAL'AK THEOPHANY
1. In Yahweh theophanies it is usual for the Deity to introduce Himself to the receiver of revelation. cf. Gen. 17:1; 26:23; 28:13; 25:11; Ex. 6:2 (Ex.3:6)	Never introduces Himself.

- Appearance is connected with a time of stress for the individual in the limited family circle according to the Biblical accounts and is invariably in a holy place.

Appearance is connected with a time of stress for the wider community: Judges 6:1-6; 13:1; cf. Ex. 2:33.

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Deliverance is effected in the immediate account following: Judges 7-8, 14-16; Ex. 5:1ff.

- When he appears he states what he will do. He reveals his plans which he is about to execute: Gen. 17:2,6; 26:2ff; 28:14,15. cf. Ex. 3:8.

When he appears he states what he would have the recipient of revelation do. He never says what he will do. Judges 6:13. cf. Ex. 3:10. Recipient is to be actively involved in the project.

- His name is never asked since his first act is always to introduce himself.

Name is always asked because he is a strange if not mysterious being to the recipient. In this context knowing the name is important and necessary.

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Always refuses to disclose his name because it is sacred: Gen. 32:29e; Judges 13:17-18; cf. Ex. 3:14.

- There is invariably a long divine speech with few or no interruptions by the recipient of revelation. Gen. 15,17.

There is a discursive dialogue between Angel and recipient: Gen. 35; Judges 6:13 etc.

8. He calls recipient of Revelation by Name: Gen. 22:1; 15:1. cf. 1 Sam.3 and Ex. 3:4 (also 1 Kings 19:9ff).

Does not address recipient by name except where he is made to speak from heaven in an official capacity as the Deity. Gen. 21:17; 22:11. Compare this with the passages where he is invariably called man in the text: Judges 6:11; 13:6,11.

9. Fire element accompanies his disclosure: Gen. 15:17.

Fire is connected with miraculous feats he performs. Judges 6:11; 13:29.

10. Makes promise to recipient which has connection with land or increase of posterity. Gen. 15:17–21; 28:13–14; 35:12–13 etc. cf. Ex. 3:8ff.

Does not.

11. Evidence is sought that what has been promised will come to pass or be fulfilled. A verbal promise is given as evidence or sign to confirm what has been said will be fulfilled. Never performs miracle as evidence or sign of the truth of what has been said.

Sign is usually sought by recipient to assure him that he has not met with just an ordinary man and that the contact has given him the recipient some supernatural powers. Miracle is usually performed. Judges 6:13 etc.

12. It is characteristic of him to allay recipient's fear or doubt with the words "I will be with you".

| 13. | When interacting with man here on earth, emphasis is exclusively on audition rather than vision: Gen. 15:17 etc. | Strong emphasis on vision and less on audition or word of the Mal'ak. There is concrete evidence that a being is seen. cf. Ex. 3:2; 3:6. |

IMPLICATION OF THIS COMPARISON FOR THE YAHWEH/MAL'AK THEOPHANY IN EXODUS 3

One striking phenomenon that stands out clear in the above table is that while the Mal'ak theophanies look very anthropomorphic, Yahweh theophanies appear more theologically befitting the spiritual status of the Deity. This conception of Yahweh in his deity status reflects, in all probability, a much later stage in Israelite understanding of her God. If this view is espoused then it means that the tradition of Moses' encounter with a Divine Being which eventually led to the release of the Israelites from Egypt is here being corrected and reshaped in the light of a later understanding of the mode of intervention of the Israelite God in the cosmos. This the writer of our text has done by combining elements from both understandings of Divine theophany and couching them in a prophetic call pattern, with additions from the "Prophetic Legends" that are usually told about holy men.[9] This concerns the mysterious episode relating to their birth, the point of transformation in their life when they acquired extraordinary powers (here the miracles Ex. 4:1ff) and the end of the holy man which is usually unlike the fate of the ordinary.

In thus presenting a literary theophany of Yahweh, it can be seen that in the author's finished work, the account of the Mal'ak theophany has not fitted completely into the new literary mould of Yahweh's theophany. This is evidenced in Ex. 3:13ff where the writer is at pains to render the non-revelation or simple refusal to give a name in a form that will make sense. This is why we have three possible suggestions of the author -- put in the mouth of Yahweh as answers or names but a theologisation of the meaning of Yahweh as Israel came to know him in practical religious experience. The author has seized on the opportunity to explain that the figure who appeared and spoke to Moses at

the burning bush is not one of the deluding spirits as might be supposed but the very God of the Hebrews, who himself declared to Moses the name by which he is to be called for ever. Therefore, the significance of the Name suggested is not an explanation which satisfies the modern philologists though eminently satisfying to the religious sense – the God who is in relation or He who is. To support our contention, it is evident that if this occasion were the true origin of the Name Yahweh, one would argue, it would have had an intelligible meaning in Hebrew, the remembrance of which would probably have been preserved by the Israelites. It is on the basis of this that one is inclined to conjecture that it must have been a much older name whose meaning the Israelites had already forgotten or did not even know, and to which they attempted later to give a meaning conformable to their own religious conceptions or experience.

Even the way the name is theologised immediately puts the narrative in a much later sociological context i.e. the period of the Exile, when the message of the statement would be both particularly relevant and also consonant with the teaching of Deutero-Isaiah.[10]

CONCLUSION

On the strength of the foregoing, one could say that it was during this time in the history of Israel when the Ark which for some time had symbolised the enthroned Yahweh in the Sabaoth "designation", was no more and the anthropomorphic characteristics which the Kabod theological designation of Yahweh connoted were on their way to oblivion, that a radical theological transformation took place in Israel – a move initiated by the pre-exilic inchoate Yahweh alone party and developed by the Deuteronomistic Theologians. And of course the destruction of the Temple contributed its quota in fuelling or provoking this transformation of Israelite theological understanding of Yahweh, his activities and mode of manifestation. It was probably at this time of Exile that the "Name Theology" was devised or developed by DTR as a means of resolving the cognitive dissonance which arose when the established tenets of the Zion-Sabaoth theology

were confronted with the harsh reality of exile. It was during this period of theological crisis that Yahweh became relocated in the heavens above and was only present here on earth amongst his people in His Name, a point which Mettinger has amply explained.[11] This, to my mind, is the reason why nowhere in the Scriptures is any appeal made at any crucial time to the revelation of Name at the Burning Bush. It goes without rebuttal that the name given should be seen as a definition by the author of what the Name Yahweh signifies rather than its revelation. This is because in the original tradition of the <u>Mal'ak</u> theophany which he used there is no provision for the revelation of Name.

From the above it can be seen that the author's concern was to use the received pre-literary tradition to answer the questions of his time. This made him adjust the tradition while at the same time endeavouring to make it seem reasonable in the context of the period he is dealing with. By so doing he constructs a tradition about the past as a means of articulating his own theological perspective.

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1.   See B. S. Childs, <u>Exodus</u> (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1984); O. Eissfeldt, <u>Die Komposition von Exodus 1-12</u>, (KS 11; T bingen, 1963); Martin Noth, <u>Exodus Commentary</u>, (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1962); H. Gressmann, <u>Moses und seine Zeit</u>, (FRLANT 18; G ttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1913); B ntsh, <u>Exodus-Leviticus-Numeri</u>, (HK; G ttingen, 1903); R.E.Clements, <u>Exodus</u>, (Cambridge Bible Commentary: Cambridge: At the University Press, 1972.

2.   Because the exercise has led to unnecessary atomization of the text, people like U.Cassuto, Rendtorff (BZAW 147, especially p. 148), Jacob and Lacocque, to mention just a few have come to discredit the exercise. Even among those who favour the practice there is no agreement. For instance,

Hyatt and Noth recognise 3:1a, 2–4a, 5, 7–8, 16–18; 4:1–12 as J and 3:1c, 4b, 6, 9–15, 19–22; 4:13–18 as E. But F.V.Winnet claims that to J belongs 3:2–4a, 5, 7, 8, 16–18; 4:1–12 while E has 3:1, 4b, 6, 9–14, 21ff; 4:17 and EJE has 3:15, 19ff; 4:13–16 with 3:8b and 3:17b introduced later by the expansionist. In this essay rather than use the literary critical method we would prefer the traditio-historical one.

3. In this investigation, the phrase "Early Traditions of Israel", is used in two different senses according to the context in which it is used. In the first sense, which is found here, it means the traditions which are projected by the Biblical writer as early but which the present author does not consider to be chronologically historical. In the second sense it is used to differentiate between the pre-literary and literary forms of the traditions of Israel. In this context the early traditions of Israel would then refer to the pre-literary form of the tradition in contradistinction to the literary form.

4. cf. A.R.Johnson, who with copious references has demonstrated how _Mal'ak_ could be one with Yahweh and also a representative of his _'d n_, cf._The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God_, (Cardiff: Univesity of Wales Press, 1961, 2nd edition).

5. See W. Baumgarten _Schweiz Theol. Umschau_ 14 (1944), p. 98 who has drawn special attention to the fact that this underlying verb "_L--K_" is found only in Arabic, Ethiopic and Ugaritic.

6. cf. Dorothy Irvin, _Mytharion: A Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East_, (AOAT; Neukirchen, 1978) 90ff.

7. Although the true picture of the emergence cannot be mapped out with any degree of certainty, yet it could be conjectured that the doctrine arose as a result of either:

        (i) the re-emergence of previously suppressed illegitimate demons,

or (ii) out of the conscious effort at transcendentalising Yahweh with the consequent need for mediatorial figures. Whichever may have been responsible, it is evident that at the time of Ezekiel and Zechariah, the belief was already beginning to gain ground. While by the time of Daniel Angels have already assumed names and become guardians of the Nation.

8. cf. Deut. 4:12, 15 correcting Ex. 24:10; and Ex 33:20 says Yahweh could not be seen even by Moses, yet in Ex. 33:11 Moses speaks with Yahweh face to face. In these references received Tradition which the people knew very well is being subjected to theological scrutiny and subtle emendation, correction or even contradiction for ideological reasons.

9. See N.Habel "Form and Significance of the Call Narrative", ZAW 77 (1965) 297-323. He developed the earlier observations of Zimmerli and was later followed by Kilian and Richter with some variations. See also John Akao's unpublished thesis, The Burning Bush: A Study of Form and Meaning in Exodus 3 and 4, (Glasgow, 1985) 115ff.

10. This, of course, corroborates J.P.Hyatt's dating of Ex. 3:14a in the 7th or 6th century B.C.E. For comparison with Deutero-Isaiah, see such passages as Is. 40:25; 41:4; 42:5; 43:11; 44:6 etc. and the use of the Exodus motif as a symbol for the restoration of Israel to the land of Canaan. Hyatt, "Was Yahweh originally a Creator Deity?" JBL 86 (1967) 375ff.

11. See his work The Dethronement of Sabaoth in the Schem and Kabod Theologies, (CWK GLEERUP) 1982.

The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. An Irish Scholar, The Church and an Irish Church. A Review Article.*
R. Buick Knox.

Theological students of my generation were brought up upon Bethune-Baker's Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine. Its basic premise is that the early Christians had experience of the presence of the living Christ and of life in the company of believers and this experience compelled them to ask the basic questions, Who is Jesus Christ? and Who is the God whom he reveals? To help them answer these questions they drew upon the memoirs of Christ's life which had been preserved in the Four Gospels and inevitably they related these memoirs to the world of Hebrew and Greek thought which was the mould which shaped their thinking. Out of this world of life and thought there gradually emerged the credal formulas which became ever more precise and refined as Christian leaders sought to refute the various heretical views which threatened to channel the faith into gnostic, mystical and philosophical by-paths or dead ends. Thus, the Church reached the formulas approved at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. These formulas brought together insights into the being and character of God, the person and work of Christ and the nature of the Christian life.

Bethune-Baker did not leave the impression that a final doctrinal position had been reached or that the doctrine of the Trinity was a final explanation of the being of God and the person of Christ, however valuable it was as a reliable aid to worship and a sound signpost to understanding in the present state of knowledge. In this, he reflected the thought of many of the German scholars to whom we were introduced.

When I had to start preparing lectures on Christian Doctrine, the Bethune-Baker star had waned before the rising star of J. N. D. Kelly, just as the continental stars had had to compete with the ascendant Barth.

Kelly has been an excellent scholar with a fine grasp of history, patristic literature and theology. In his Early Christian Creeds and Early Christian Doctrines his

basic premise is that the definitions reached at Chalcedon were already implicit in the New Testament which itself was the reliable deposit of the faith and life of the early Church. The Chalcedonian position is the expression of the authoritative revelation already given to the Church in and through Jesus Christ from the earliest days of the Church's life. Kelly is too much of an Anglican Oxonian to be counted as a Barthian but he has the parallel stance of seeing in the doctrinal tradition of the Church the revelation of who God really is and of what he has done in the Incarnation for our salvation.

Kelly has held the stage for the last twenty years and he has stabilised much theological thought in the traditional scriptural, incarnational and patristic mould. Other scholars have cultivated the same ground over recent years but the next major stage in the story is the publication of the late Richard Hanson's <u>magnum opus</u> bearing the title of this article and in which he has dealt with the Arian Controversy, 318-381. I had a long friendship with Richard Hanson stretching from student days through the time when I was a minister in the Banbridge Presbytery and he was the curate in the same parish; this was maintained through his years as professor, bishop and professor. He was a stimulating friend and we had many conversations during his years of research in preparing this vast work which he was able to see completed before his death. He was an acid commentator on what he saw as the shallowness of much contemporary theology. He was a strong believer in the importance of theology as a discipline with its own terms of reference, especially the regulative place of Scripture in the formation of Christian doctrine. He had an amazing knowledge of patristic literature, as this book reveals.

In the early chapters, Hanson seems to have returned to be very close to the position of Bethune-Baker; the word "search" in the title seems to indicate a quest for an explanation of the experience people have had when within the circle of Jesus and his followers. He starts from the teaching of Origen who, for all his biblical scholarship, had a graded God; the Son could not be on a level with God though he was in a moral accord with his purpose. this

influenced Arius, for whom any incarnation, revelation and redemption had to be a lowering, a work done by a being who, though divine, was less than fully divine; "God does not condescend to human contacts nor to human flesh", but the Son has mediatorial functions and has aims in accord with the purpose of God.

The New Testament is not without texts which can be used in this sense: "God made Jesus both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Arians tended to think of Jesus as a mere man who was open to suffering and therefore could not be of the essence of God who is impassible, that is, immune from suffering. When Arians were faced with claims for the divinity of Jesus they conceded at most that he was a lesser God subordinate to the High God.

The Emperor Constantine regarded the issue as "a futile irrelevance" and urged reconciliation. Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, did not see it as an irrelevance. He held that Jesus Christ had an inherent and not an adoptive Sonship. The Council of Nicea was summoned to resolve the issue. Meeting in 325 A.D., it produced a statement of the Faith in which Arius' teaching was condemned. Eusebius of Caesarea tried to take the credit for the outcome. He held that the Council adopted the creed of his church at Caesarea. This view had often been challenged but Kelly tended to rehabilitate it. Hanson, however, notes what he calls "startling innovations" in the Nicene formula, particularly the use of the word homoousios to signify that Christ was of "the same essence" as the Father. Athanasius, a presbyter of Alexandria, became the champion of this position. Following the Gospel of John, he held that God had revealed himself in Christ in whom people had seen all they needed to see to be in the presence of God; whoever has seen the Son has seen the Father. Athanasius so emphasised the completeness of the presence of God in Christ that Hanson is led to conclude that he was in danger of undermining the humanity and freewill of Christ. Hanson also thinks that Athanasius'
disciple, Hilary of Poitiers, went even further and came to a view which meant that "at the very point where Christ's solidarity with humankind is most crucial – in his suffering – he was not really human!"

Nevertheless, Athanasius stood firm for the central claim that in Christ God himself had achieved our redemption and provided the medicine of immortality for corruptible and sinful human beings.

The foundations laid at Nicea were built upon by others, notably the three Cappadocians. Basil of Caesarea in Cappadocia was, according to Hanson, a serious theologian who clarified the thought of the Church on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. There was a note of bitterness in some of his actions; he had been forced to surrender part of his bishopric to another bishop and Hanson says "it is as difficult to persuade a bishop to surrender part of his see as it is to persuade a dog to part with a bone"! Yet, he was a man of vast and useful activity, founding schools and hospitals and defining canon law; Hanson calls him "the bright start of the Eastern Church." Hear the splendid opening words of his commentary on Genesis:

> God is blessed nature, unstinting goodness, the object of love for all who share reason, the deeply-desired beauty, the origin of all existing things, the fountain of life, intellectual light, unapproachable wisdom – he it is who in the beginning made heaven and earth.

Gregory of Nyssa had a mind of great subtlety and power and he illumined many of the darker corners of the Church's doctrine. Hanson holds that he also had "an extraordinary incapacity to face crises when they occurred in his career, as they occur in all careers." However, he took important steps towards a doctrine of the persons of the Trinity, separate but inseparable. The destiny of redeemed souls is to spend eternity exploring the inexhaustible infinity of God which could only be fathomed in part in this life.

Gregory of Nazianzus was the third Cappadocian and he was called to be the bishop of Constantinople. It fell to him to preside at the Council which was summoned to meet in

Constantinople in 381 A.D. to deal with issues which had arisen since Nicea. Various attempts had been made to draw up fresh statements of the faith and Hanson says they had "as much delicacy and intellectual refinement as an auctioneer's catalogue" but they did pave the way for the generally acceptable creed drawn up at Constantinople. Gregory did not think highly of the calibre of the assembled bishops. He likened them to a "rabble of adolescents, people to whom nobody who was mature either in the fear of God or in years would pay any attention". Yet, that Council produced the Creed which is now known as the Nicene Creed and is still the common Creed of Churches in the East and the West. Hanson holds that for all the faults of the Council it brought together a sound scriptural understanding of redemption, of the suffering of God in Christ and of the inherited tradition and church practice. It worked out a form of one of the most crucial doctrines of the Bible, the doctrine of God.

Hanson concludes that the story of this period was not a story of embattled and confident orthodoxy maintaining a long and finally successful struggle against heresy. Orthodoxy was reached, not maintained. In the process, it had even learned from the Arians that "in some sense God himself had suffered in the course of saving mankind." The process was a process of trial and error but it was not the outcome of free speculation. It was a grasping of the intention and drift of the whole Scripture story and out of it came "the full genius and drive of the Christian faith." Athanasius had discerned at an early stage that the Incarnation was "an indispensable necessity if the goodness and healing activity of God, and not just his justice and truth, were to be manifested and communicated to men and women and thus remedy the absurd situation whereby human beings created for a good purpose by God wholly miss that purpose and fall into nothingness and decay." The story, says Hanson, led to a satisfactory answer to the great question which had fired the search for the Christian doctrine of God. The development had led to discovery of the truth which was already there in the person and work of Christ. Little wonder, then, that from then till now the definitions of Constaninople in 381 A.D. and of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. have proved to be the lasting

basis of the thought and worship of the vast proportion of Christendom. They have been embodied in the confessional statements of many branches of the Church. They are central to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

When the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was formed in 1840 it attached itself firmly to the Westminster Confession and thereby to the doctrines set forth in the Nicene Creed. It had no doubts or queries about the scriptural basis for this orthodox position.

For the first half of the Assembly's life that position was firmly maintained. However, the impactof fresh biblical and theological studies arising from textual researches and from scientific discoveries and theories could not be permanently resisted. The loudest voices were, of course, those defending the unwavering adherence to the old paths and pouring scorn on the "higher critics". Nevertheless, at the time of the celebration of the Assembly's jubilee, there were signs of unease. In a sermon preached in Gortnessy in 1889 on the eve of the jubilee, Professor T. H. Witherow of Magee College, Londonderry, said there was a spirit of restlessness abroad in the community, a spirit which challenged the creeds and confessions andthe authority of the Bible. He acknowledged that it was a time of transition from the formality and orthodoxy of the past fifty years into a time of doubt and unbelief and there would be great changes – political, social and religious – but these could not be averted; "happen what may, Presbyterians must make the best of their circumstances and study to use them for their own and the general good." Witherow called the Church to be of good courage and "the Lord do that which seemeth to him good." Here was the recognition that, firm as are the foundations and however great the dislike of changes to what is built thereon, changes are part of life and have to be encountered and taken into account. At the jubilee celebrations addresses were given on various aspects of the life of the church during the fifty years since the formation of the General Assembly. Among the speakers was the eloquent Robert Lynd, minister of May Street Church; he defended the doctrinal position of the Church and maintained that the Calvinist teaching in the Westminster

Confession was not, as some held, unprogressive and prohibitory of freedom of thought or fervent spiritual feeling. On the other hand, he criticised those who insisted on using what he called "the stereotyped phraseology of a bygone century as if it were the only expression of a true faith"; he also criticised those who sneered at biblical or scientific criticism as if it were laying hands upon the Ark of God.

This aroused some criticism, mainly on the ground that other expressions of the faith, however right and valuable, did not devalue the truth as set forth in the traditional form, and also on the ground that those who took part in criticism had not produced appropriate substitutes.

In the same year, at the opening Session of the English Presbyterian College in London, John Skinner gave his inaugeral lecture on The Critical reconstruction of Old Testament History and he spoke of the sources used in the compilation of the first five books of the Old Testament which bore the name of Moses. Skinner was to become one of the most influential biblical teachers noted for the depth of his scholarship and of his faith. Compare his lecture with that delivered the same year in the College in Belfast by Professor Matthew Leitch. He declared the views of scholars such as Skinner to be "as unscientific, as untrue to the facts of history and the facts of human nature as any of the hundred other theories now exploded and forgotten, which originated in the ponderous learning, the ill-balanced judgment and the aggressive infidelity of continental scholars."

Even admitting that there have been scores of discarded theories and that scholars have been ponderous, ill-balanced and aggressive, we cannot live as if the theories had not been propounded and as if the scholars had never written. At the opening of the 1893 Session of the College in Belfast Professor Todd Martin, with characteristic clarity, said "I see no objection to the proposal to restate the dogmas of the Creed, but the difficulty is a practical one - the difficulty of finding a body of men who will give a better statement of the truth

than the one we have." He claimed that the truth set forth in the Creed and further expounded in the Westminster Confession was an abiding truth and still provided the teaching which his generation needed to hear; it was truth which answered the quest of the intelligent person of his day. On the other hand, he held that that intelligent person needed to recognise that the revelation of God in his Word also judged the thought of human thinkers. He said that Positivism, Hegelianism and Evolutionism each in their own way professed to exhibit the universal law of change throughout the totality of known or knowable being, but amid the flux, the way of faith still led on to "the idea of a God-thought, God-created, God-governed world." On another occasion, Todd Martin admitted that the Church had always gained some new light even from the heresies which it had rightly rejected, but the Creed which had come out of the early controversies had proved to be a sound guide on the way to faith. Here, he anticipated the findings of Hanson.

Across the centuries since the time of Christ people have wrestled with the meaning and challenge of his teaching and have sought to know who he is and what he demands. They have found that his influence shapes their language, their ways of thought and life and their ways of worship. This has gone on in the Middle East, in Europe and in North Africa since the time of St Paul and then in Celtic and other lands. It goes on in many other parts of the world, such as India and southern Africa where the Gospel has been planted in more recent centuries.

The most abiding form of Christian teaching which has survived transplanting into all parts of the world has proved to be that provided by the thinkers who built upon the Greek of the New Testament and used the Greek language to express what they believed. This reached its climax in the Creeds with which Hanson has dealt in his mammoth volume. Some have claimed that all the arguments around the formation of the Creeds have distorted the plain message of the Christ and have proved the bankruptcy of attempts to express the Gospel in terms of Greek philosophy. Barth is reputed to have said that for him the core of the Gospel was in the words

>   "Jesus loves me! this I know
>   For the Bible tells me so,"

but this did not deter him from producing his vast array of
volumes to explain what he meant by Jesus and the Bible.

Though there has been what Ernest Davey called "the
changing vesture of the Faith", it can be held that the
vesture provided by the Creeds still provides the raiment
in which Christians recognize God in Christ and worship
God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Indeed, this raiment
has been the inspiration of some of the most sublime
musical compositions and of the most enduring hymns.

All who read Hanson's work will be much better
informed about the life of the early Church; they will
learn many fascinating details such as the fact that
Eunomius was a teacher of the system of Greek shorthand
which had been devised by Prunicus, a fourth-century
Pitman; they will also learn how the Creeds embody the
teaching of the Bible and lead to the knowledge of God, the
God who is, the God who speaks, the God who acts, God the
holy and undivided Trinity.

R. Buick Knox.

* The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The
Arian Controversy 318-381, by R. P. C. Hanson. T & T Clark,
1988. Pp. xxi + 931.

<u>Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah</u>, by David W. Baker, Tyndale
Old Testament Commentaries, Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. pp.
121   3.75.

In the Introduction to each of the commentaries in
this volume, Baker deals with the issues under four
headings: the Man, the Times, the Book and the Message.
(The headings vary slightly, according to the needs of each
book, while the order in which they are treated also
changes slightly). The section on Nahum also includes an
Additional Note on rhetorical questions.

In the Introduction to Nahum, Baker suggests a mid-
seventh century B.C. dating. He favours a location for
Elkosh (1:1) in Judah. (However the provision of a map
would have assisted the discussion of the location of
Elkosh). In the Commentary, he does not gloss over transla-
tion difficulties. He sets these out in such a way as to
make them intelligible to those who have no knowledge of
Hebrew, as well as to those who are used to coping with
such problems.

In the Habakkuk commentary, he also incorporates
textual issues into the main text and footnotes. In the
Introduction to Habakkuk, he identifies "the wicked" of 1:4
with Judaeans who had forsaken the Law and "the wicked" of
1:13 with the Babylonians. He dates the book as a whole to
the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598). However it is unfortunate
that this discussion of dating is so brief - the one page
which is devoted to dating imposes limits which make this
a suggestion rather than an argument leading to a con-
clusion. For a survey of the various proposals on the date
of Habakkuk, he simply refers the reader to Jocken (written
in German and therefore not easily accessible to many
readers).

He dates the book of Zephaniah to Josiah's reign,
arguing that at least chapters 2 and 3 pre-date Josiah's
reforms (c. 621 B.C.). He allows the possibility that the
reforms may not have been so successful as Kings/Chronicles
claim and therefore that the material in chapter one could
have had its origin after this period. Nevertheless he sees

the book as a unity and argues that the concept of the Day
of Yahweh serves to unify the book both structurally and
theologically. He also offers structural analysis of the
internal unity of 3:14-17 and 3:19-20.

Throughout this volume Baker's argumentation is
clear, concise and scholarly. In line with the general aim
of the series, it will appeal both to the student and the
general reader and as such will prove to be a useful
contribution to the study of the Minor Prophets.

Gilian Keys.

The Living Psalms, by Claus Westermann, Edinburgh, T. & T.
Clark, 1989. pp. 320   9.95

J.R. Porter's translation of Claus Westermann's
Ausgewählte Psalmen provides the English reader with an
introduction to the Psalms which is intended to 'let the
psalms speak for themselves'. Based on his own earlier
studies, Westermann, one of the doyens of German Old
Testament scholarship, organizes his discussion according
to the main literary types found within the Psalter.
Convinced that most psalms express emotions of praise,
lament or trust, he categorizes the Psalter under these
heading, distinguishing further between those intended for
communal or individual use. A number of other minor
categories are also briefly considered (royal; liturgical;
Zion; blessing; wisdom).

This general approach has several consequences as
regards content and presentation. First, Westermann
selects those psalms which suit best his overall view of
the nature of Hebrew psalmody. Only about forty psalms are
examined, and some of these are discussed but briefly.
Secondly, the order in which these psalms are considered
bears no relation to the present arrangement of the
Psalter. One must consult either the list of contents or

the index to discover if and where a particular psalm is discussed.

Although Westermann's discussion is often helpful and illuminating, one cannot but feel at times that he fails to capture the tremendous diversity of emotions which are found in the psalms. While there is much to be gained by observing the different classes of psalms, there is always the danger of pressing some psalms into set categories rather than treating them as unique specimens. For example, because Psalm 27 as a whole does not fall neatly into any single category, Westermann divides it in half: verses 1-6 form a psalm of trust, verses 7-14 a lament. Such a procedure detracts considerably from the multifarious nature of the psalms. Given the great diversity of the psalms any scheme of categorization must be applied with the utmost caution.

Another feature of Westermann's overall approach which must be questioned is his dismissal of the psalm titles. He treats all of them as later additions, bearing no relation to the original composition and/or use of the psalms. Such skepticism seems unwarranted in the light of what we now know of ancient near eastern practice. The discovery of a Hurrian cult song at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) reveals that it was not unusual for a tablet containing a song to record in a colophon details regarding the type of hymn, the musical scale and the scribe responsible for making the copy. While uncertainty may exist about the value of the present psalm titles, it is surely unwise to reject them entirely. Moreover, on occasions they may provide a useful guide to the setting in which particular psalms were used (e.g., the recurring title in Psalms 120-134 _'a song of ascents'Ñ highlights their use by pilgrims).

As a non-technical introduction to the form-critical study of the psalms Westermann's book reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of this method. Used with caution, and noting its limitations, it is a useful

addition to the many popular studies on the Psalms already
available.

                                        T.D. Alexander

The Hasideans and the Origin of Pharisaism. A Study in 1
and 2 Maccabees, by John Kampen. Septuagint and Cognate
Studies 24, Scholars Press, 1988. Pp. x + 240. Np.

        This thorough and detailed study of the Hasideans and
their importance or otherwise for the origin of the
Pharisees represents a valuable and perhaps definitive
study on a subject where insufficient evidence has given
rise to wide differences of opinion. Not that the evidence
means that Dr Kempen clears up all the problems but it does
represent an attractive line of consideration of possible
solutions. He writes: "The history of scholarship concern-
ing the Hasideans of the second century B.C.E. is a fitting
illustration of the old adage repeated by historians that
the fewer the references, the greater the number of books
and articles." (1)

        The form "Hasidean" reflects its Greek derivation
Asidaioi, a term only found in Graeco-Jewish literature and
only in 1 Macc 2:42 and 7:12; and in 2 Macc 14:6, probably
a transliteration of the Hebrew Hasydym, often understood
as "pious".

        The book opens with a comprehensive look at "The
Hasideans in Modern Study." (1-43) The word hasyd has
links with hesed in the prophetic literature and one major
contribution demonstrated the intergral relationship
between the hasyd and hesed and covenant. (3f) Based on the
use of hesed in the prophetic literature, H. Glueck (Hesed
in the Bible) (3) declares "Hesed is the reciprocal conduct
of men towards one another and, at the same time, explicit-
ly and implicitly, the proper relationship towards God."
(3) The hasyd is one who practises hesed (a term translated
"Mercy" (KJV, "Steadfast Love" (RSV), "Love" (JB). Glueck,
however, it would appear, had not taken into account

sufficiently that <u>hasyd</u> is used almost exclusively in the Psalms. (4) Bowen (7) distinguished the <u>Hasydym</u> of the Bible from the <u>Asidaioi</u> in 1 and 2 Macc. The <u>Hasydym</u> were all of the sons of Israel; or, more narrowly, men of integrity and religious zeal. The <u>Asidaioi</u> were simply zealots for the law. (7)

A welter of suggestions are given of a very interesting kind (9-34): Robert Pfeiffer's suggestion that the author of the book of Daniel was probably a leader of the <u>Hasydym</u> and that the theology of the book of Daniel was similar to that of the Psalms, considered to be Hasidic (12); Otto Plöger's view that the division between the righteous and the godless in the Psalms and Wisdom literature indicates a division within Israel concerning the centrality of an eschatological faith; (13) that the general term <u>Hasid</u> applied to all God's people in covenant (cf. Bowen) but, at the same time, was used for special religious functionaries only coming to the fore occasionally; (16) among those who find the origin of the Hasideans among the scribes are numbered H. M. Orlinsky, Abel, Wellhausen (Finkelstein finds their origin among the scribes at the time of Ezra); (18-22) the view that the <u>Hasydym</u> were the authors of apocalyptic is repudiated for lack of evidence. (22-31)

Chapter two deals with "The Use of the Name – Asidaioi," concentrating on three references in the Maccabaean writings, 1 Macc 2:42 and 7:12 and 2 Macc 14:6. (The rarity of the term renders the task quite daunting!) and concludes "the only reasonable conclusion which can be drawn from these three references is that there was a group called the Hasidim who played an important role in Jewish affairs at the time that the Jews revolted against the tyrannical rule of Antiochus iv Epiphanes." (63)

Chapter three gives extensive treatment to "The Hasideans in First and Second Maccabees", covering some eight-six pages. (65-150) It sets out to find what the text tells us about the people who bore the name "hasideans". Dr Kampen does not agree with the view of many commentators on the interpretation of 1 Macc 2:29: "Many who were seeking

righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to dwell there." Verses 29-39, he claims, should not be used as evidence for the Hasideans but v.29 may refer to the Essene movement. Rather, evidence suggests that the Hasideans are part of an increasing number of people who link up with the Maccabean movement to resist Antiochus iv Epiphanes. (148) They are made up of leading citizens given over to the law. The description _ischuroi dynamei_ refers to their stature in society, not to outstanding fighting qualities. Were they leaders? Certanly they can be identified with the scribes in 1 Macc 7:12-13 (cf. 2:42). Yet in the longer account in 1 Macc 7 where such leading citizens seek an accommodation with their Greek conquerors, the author attempts to discount the significance of the Hasideans. (So Kampen, 149) In 2 Maccabees, the picture is somewhat different. At 14:6 the author uses the Hasideans to improve the already high profile of Judah, suggesting he is a man of piety and purity. "Thus we see that the author of 2 Macc regarded the Hasmoneans to be well-known people, renowned for their purity in the time of Hellenization and for their piety ... in 1 Macc the Hasideans must be considered to be among the leading personalities for the era." (149-150)

Chapter four deals with "The Essenes and the Hasidim?", a discussion which proves largely inconclusive; chapter five with "The Hasidim in the Talmudic literature" and the final chapter six with "The Hasidim, the Pharisees and the Maccabees." The author concludes his discussion: "it may well be that within the scribal circles of the Hasidim we find the origin of that later movement known as Pharisaism."

This fresh discussion with its important insights and careful assessments makes Dr Kampen's conclusion all the more welcome against the context of often greatly varied and perhaps confusing points of view.

E. A. Russell.

Irish Biblical Apocrypha: Selected texts in translation,
edited by Maire Herbert and Martin McNamara MSC, Edinburgh:
T & T Clark, 1989.

As Father McNamara remarks in his introduction, the
past few years have witnessed a 'more than ordinary
interest' in apocryphal literature. This has culminated in
the appearance of two important collections of texts in
translation: The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, edited by
James H. Charlesworth; and The Apocryphal Old Testament,
edited by H. F. D. Sparks. Irish Biblical Apocrypha is a
valuable supplement to these general collections. By making
available to a wider audience translations of a representa-
tive selection of Irish apocryphal writings, the editors
have facilitated a fuller assessment of the role of the
Irish church in the preservation and transmission of
apocrypha in the early medieval period.

While scholars in the past have readily acknowledged
the familiarity of the medieval Irish church with a wide
range of apocryphal materials, there have been
comparatively few attempts to place these Irish writings
within the wider context of surviving corpus of biblical
apocrypha. However, the publication of David Dunville's
paper 'Biblical Apocrypha and the Early Irish: A Prelimi-
nary Investigation' (PRIA 73 C (1973), 229-338), and Father
McNamara's study and catalogue, The Apocrypha in the Irish
Church (Dublin, 1975), marked an important advance. The
present volume builds on this foundation and further
advances an understanding of Ireland's particular contribu-
tion to apocryphal literature.

The Introduction and Notes to the Texts provide a
concise and useful guide to the selections and bring the
reader up to date with advances in scholarship since the
publication of The Apocrypha in the Irish Church. Reference
is made to this work in almost every note, and it is
desirable to use Irish Biblical Apocrypha in conjunction
with Father McNamara's earlier publication. In order to
derive the fullest benefit from the present work, the
translated texts need to be studied alongside Charles-

worth's Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and Hennecke- Schneem-
elcher-Wilson's New Testament Apocrypha. While the notes
are valuable in identifying sources and placing the Irish
writings in the context of the wider apocryphal tradition,
a more expansive style of annotation, such as that adopted
by Charlesworth, would have been helpful to non-specialist
readers and to scholars of other medieval literatures.

The texts, translated by Maire Herbert, provide a
representative selection from most of the major categories
of apocryphal literature represented in Irish: hexaemeral
writings; the lives and deaths of the prophets; expansions
of the Old Testament; infancy gospels; materials relating
to the life and ministry of Jesus; accounts of John the
Baptist; accounts of the Transitus Mariae; Descensus
literature; and apocalyptic writings. The trito-canonical
III and IV Esdras and III and IV Maccabees, which also
enjoyed considerable popularity in the early medieval
period, are not represented, since their canonical status
in the Irish church is doubtful.

One of the main impressions to emerge from a reading
of Irish Biblical Apocrypha is the impact which apocryphal
literature made on the creative imagination of writers.
Many of the texts included in the selection are not
straightforward translations of Latin originals, but are
original compositions or adaptations which have drawn on
apocryphal themes. Two themes in particular seem to have
exercised their imaginations: hexaemeral writings and
apocalypse. The poetic and prose versions of the Saltair na
Rann (Texts 2, 3 and 4) demonstrate the impact of the Vita
Adae et Evae and the Apocalypsis Mosis. The preoccupation
with eschatological questions is evident in The Two Sorrows
of the Kingdom of Heaven (Text 6), Antichrist (Text 27, The
Seven Journeys of the Soul (Text 28) and The Signs before
Doomsday (Text 29).   Indeed, the latter theme was an
especially productive one. Visionary literature is represe-
nted by the Gospel of Nicodemus (Text 19), the Visio Pauli
(Text 25), and The Vision of Adomnan (Text 26). Even when
the Irish translation follows a Latin text fairly closely,
as in the case of the Gospel of Nicodemus, there are
intriguing hints that it may have interpreted in an unusual

way. The notion that Christ in the Harrowing of Hell released not merely the righteous who had died under the old covenant, but also those virtuous pagans who listened to His preaching, may show the influence of the Irish view of the Natural Good on this apocryphal text.

A reading of these texts also raises larger issues. Given the role of such missionaries as Aidan of Lindisfarne in the conversion of Northumbria, and the many subsequent contacts between the Irish and Anglo-Saxon churches, it is only natural to look for possible Irish influences on attitudes to apocryphal texts in Anglo-Saxon England. This volume brings to light many parallels between Irish and Old English apocryphal writings. Bede in his <u>Historia Eccle-siastica Gentis Anglorum</u> not only tells of the otherworld vision of the Irish monk Fursa (Book III. 19); he also gives an account of the vision of the Northumbrian Dryhthelm which is closely linked to Irish traditions of visionary literature. There are Old English translations of the Visio Pauli and the Gospel of Nicodemus, and the influence of <u>Descensus</u> literature can be traced in poems as varied as <u>Beowulf</u> and <u>The Dream of the Rood</u>.

A further parallel between Irish and Anglo-Saxon uses of apocryphal materials is found in the extent to which vernacular writers have drawn inspiration from apocryphal sources. The Old English poem <u>Genesis B</u> makes use of material originating from the <u>Vita Adae et Evae</u> and the <u>Apocalypsis Mosis</u>. <u>Andreas</u> is a poetic version of The Acts of Andrew and Matthias in the City of the Anthropophagi. In <u>Genesis A</u> the poet drew on an Irish source for the names of Noah's wife and daughters-in-law. The authors of the Vercelli and Blickling homilies were clearly influenced by the legend of the Fifteen Signs before Doomsday. Many more examples could be cited. The main point, however, is that Anglo-Saxon writings can also be a significant source for tracing the influence of Irish apocryphal writings.

<u>Irish Biblical Apocrypha</u> is of value not only to students of Irish texts and apocryphal writings. It will be welcomed by all who are interested in early medieval

literature and culture, and especially by those who wish to explore the relationship between Ireland and England during this period. It raises many important cultural questions, and will stimulate scholarship in this field. As the editors acknowledge (p. xxviii), it is in one sense an interim publication, meant to serve until the appearance of the full corpus of Irish Apocrypha. Nevertheless, it is an important contribution in its own right to the fields of biblical studies and medieval studies.

Ivan Herbison